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HARVARD THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

Through the courtesy of Professor William H. Allison, of Colgate Seminary, we are able to present some intimate impressions on the recent Conference of Theological Seminaries at Cambridge, which was unique both as to the forces brought together and the consciousness of common problems which found expression.

Last spring, at the call of President Horr of Newton Theological Institution, representatives of seven Baptist theological seminaries met at Newton, Mass., to consider the special problems confronting theological seminaries as a result of the Great War. This attracted the attention of President Lowell of Harvard University, who invited the Conference to a luncheon given by the Faculty of the Harvard Divinity School. Dr. Horr then made the suggestion that Harvard University invite a larger conference to consider the important problems confronting the seminaries. Although the mid-summer date set for the assembling of the Conference made a large attendance seem doubtful, more than fifty theological institutions were represented by over one hundred delegates, while the presence of about thirty specially invited educators increased the representative character of the Conference.

At the reception to delegates and their wives, President Lowell spoke on "The Social and Religious Problems which the War has Presented to the Minister," recognizing the idealism manifest in the present situation, but calling attention to the fact that previous great wars have invariably been followed by periods of moral and spiritual decline. His implication was that constant effort should be made to prevent the repetition of such an experience and the pertinency of the Conference was, of course, obvious.

The first formal session was held Wednesday morning, August 14th, the sessions continuing mornings and afternoons until Friday noon. The specific topics appearing on the program were the following:

General Theme: Problems of Theological Education Arising Out of the War.

- (1) Causes affecting the number and quality of theological students.
- (2) The measures to be taken by the theological schools to meet the shortage of ministers which will arise after the war.
- (3) The indispensable minimum and the unattainable ideal in theological education.
- (4) The obligation resting upon the theological schools to provide adequate training for:
 - (a) The parish minister.
 - (b) Religious education in school and college, and in church and Sunday school.
 - (c) Professional teachers of theological disciplines.
 - (d) Social service.
 - (e) Missions.
- (5) To what extent can the "case system" or the "clinical method" be followed in practical training for the ministry?
- (6) To what extent should preaching and parish work by students be restricted?
- (7) What limitations are desirable in the use of beneficiary aid?

The presiding officer at each session, in each case the head of a theological school, opened the discussion and there was full as much attention paid to related questions as to the topics specifically stated in the program. In fact, only to a limited extent did the various speakers treat their subjects as in any peculiar way affected by the war situation, which perhaps confirms the wide-spread view that the problems confronting theological education are fundamental and vital, to be solved by the consideration of other factors than those obtruding under present abnormal conditions. While the war has seriously affected the attendance at the theological seminaries, the discussion of the first topic above, opened by President Mackenzie of Hartford, dealt almost altogether with pre-war and permanent aspects of the situation. Thus Dr. Mackenzie referred to the attraction of secular careers with their greater material emoluments, the rise of new professions which afford opportunity for altruism, changes in the intellectual life, and the increasing hindrance of an uninspiring ministry. Dr. Williston Walker of Yale School of Religion called attention to a change of our feeling toward oratory; it is in better repute in the south and west and the main supply of students is in those regions. Dr. J. Ross Stevenson of Princeton Theological Seminary, in discussing the second topic, referred more specifically to war-time conditions and spoke of plans of the War-Time Commission of the Churches by which it was hoped that men now looking to the ministry might be held to their purpose, especially during the trying days of demobilization.

President Barbour of Rochester, in opening the discussion on the third topic, called attention to the necessity of receiving the attitude of the seminaries towards men without college training. There was also need of revising some judgments as to the curriculum, for we often cling to methods and formulas after their meaning is lost. Professor Allison of Colgate was asked to report on the educational standards for ordina-

tion in the various Protestant denominations. While the committee of the Commission on Christian Education of the Federal Council which, with the co-operation of the Council of Church Boards of Education, is investigating this matter, has not completed its work, not only is lack of adequate standard apparent, but there is danger that the exceptions to the regular rules are becoming themselves the actual operative standards.

The discussion of the last four topics naturally brought out much information concerning practical methods of handling these detailed aspects of ministerial education and emphasized what Dean Bartlett of the Philadelphia Divinity School referred to as the shifting center of gravity in the theological education.

A Committee of Findings emphasized the importance that students for the ministry should have guidance in preparation for their theological studies similar to that given to students intending to enter other professional schools. It also recommended, and the Conference adopted the suggestion, that a Continuation Committee should be appointed which might carry out some of the suggestions of the Conference and which was empowered to call the Conference together again for consultation or for any purpose in which the co-operation of the theological schools may seem necessary or important.

The following evening the delegates were the guests at a dinner at the Harvard Club, Boston, when John F. Moore, Esq., Fellow of Harvard College, spoke on "What the Layman Asks of the Ministry." Addresses were also made by President Lowell, Bishop Lawrence and President Horr. A devotional service was held each morning at Appleton Chapel, the last one being a Communion Service at which Bishop Lawrence officiated.

At the first session, Dr. Foakes Jackson remarked that prior to the War, such a conference would have been impossible in England. Doubtless this was the most representative conference of theological seminaries which has yet been held in this country. Unless there should be some development through the action of the Continuation Committee, the Conference, significant as it was, can scarcely be called epoch-making; yet two or three comments may be pertinent. (1) The men closest to the problems of theological education understand full well the nature of the difficulties confronting the theological seminaries. (2) They thoroughly believe in the task which the seminaries are endeavoring to accomplish and they believe that the churches must demand more insistently that the ministry be trained in the theological seminaries. (3) The character of the delegates at the Cambridge Conference, being representative of the larger groups forming the faculties of our theological seminaries, should justify a larger confidence in the theological seminaries and should lead to a demand that the cheap criticism of the seminaries which is much in vogue in some quarters should be abandoned.